

César Franck

Organ Works/Volume Two

JEANNE DEMESSIEUX

AT THE ORGAN OF THE CHURCH OF THE MADELEINE, PARIS



CESAR FRANCK ORGAN WORKS Volume 2

Choral No. 2 in B minor
Fantaisie in C major, Op. 16
Grande pièce symphonique, Op. 17

JEANNE DEMESSIEUX
at the Organ of the Church of the Madeleine, Paris

César Franck, although a native of Liège in Belgium, lived most of his life in Paris, and came to be regarded as a French composer. For many years, up to the time of his death, he was organist of the church of Sainte-Clotilde, and his organ music is among his finest work. Living at a time when French music was at its lightest and least serious, earning an international reputation for its flippancy – and this applied to organ music as much as to stage works – Franck brought a note of lofty purpose to it. In his youth, he too, as a piano virtuoso, perpetrated trivialities, but his maturity produced a series of works – a piano quintet, a string quartet, a symphony and a violin and piano sonata among them – which are among the loftiest in sentiment and most lyrical of their time. Franck's organ music consists in the main of twelve pieces: a set of six and a set of three, composed before the instrumental masterpieces of his maturity, and a final set of three, the *Trois Chorals* which are the last music he wrote.

The young Belgian was fifteen when he entered the Paris Conservatoire where he studied for five years. In that time he won a First Prize for Fugue and a Second Prize for Organ. After two years in his native land, Franck returned in 1844 to Paris, his home for the remainder of his life. He earned his living not as a piano virtuoso, as his father would have wished, but as a teacher of piano and an organist. His first organ appointment in Paris was at Notre-Dame-de-Lorette. In 1853, at the age of thirty, Franck was appointed organist of Saint-Jean-Saint-François. The move was of crucial importance to him, for the great French organ-builder of the time, Aristide Cavallé-Coll, had recently installed a new two-manual organ in this church, and his tonal ideals, already exemplified in this instrument, were to have a marked effect on the young composer's organ music. Already in 1854, Franck must have been well thought of as an organist, for he was one of the players invited to take part in the inauguration of the organ at Saint-Eustache in 1854, alongside his countryman, the famous Lemmens. Franck's third and final move was in 1858 to the church of Sainte-Clotilde, a new building in which Cavallé-Coll had just installed what is generally regarded as his masterpiece; a three manual instrument with about fifty speaking stops. One can judge the delight of Franck who already used to refer to the smaller instrument at his previous church as his "orchestra". It was the Sainte-Clotilde organ that provided the instrumental inspiration for his twelve organ pieces, for they are all conceived and registered in terms of its romantic organ colours, even though the *Trois Pièces* of 1878 were composed specifically for the opening of another Cavallé-Coll organ, that installed in the Paris Trocadéro for the great Exhibition of that year. If an earlier generation may be said to have introduced court music into the organ loft, a process of secularisation developed by such 'symphonic' successors of Franck as Charles-Marie Widor and Louis Vierne, it is equally true to say that in a number of his organ pieces the organist of Sainte-Clotilde evoked the cloister in the concert-room.

It is recorded that Franck played all the *Six Pièces* to his friend and admirer, Liszt, at Sainte-Clotilde on 13 April, 1866. Liszt afterwards declared: "These poetic pieces have a clearly marked place alongside the masterpieces of Johann Sebastian Bach". High praise, but more than a century of organ recitals has shown that, together with their companions, the *Trois Pièces* and the *Trois Chorals*, they have occupied in the estimation of players and audiences precisely the place accorded them by Liszt.

TROIS CHORALS (1890)

Choral No. 2 in B minor

Franck, like Bach and Brahms and, still more recently, Glazounov and Martinů, confided his last thoughts to the organ. The *Trois Chorals* were his last works. They were composed between the beginning of August and September 23, 1890, in the home of some friends of his in Nemours, a town not far from Paris. Franck, who had already suffered the *fiacre* accident later proved to be the cause of his death, had gone there to complete a collection of one hundred harmonium pieces commissioned by the publisher Enoch. But Nemours must have inspired him differently, for the fruits of this final holiday were the much weightier *Trois Chorals*. Franck corrected the proofs on his deathbed, after having dragged himself to Sainte-Clotilde to verify his registrations, and they first appeared in print after his death.

In the *Trois Chorals* may be found the purest and most complete expression of Franck's genius as a composer. They derive more from the later Beethoven Quartets than from the chorale preludes of Bach: they are, in a sense, variations on chorale-like theme, but welded into musical wholes unimagined by the earlier composers of organ *partite*.

The second Choral, which is in B minor and inscribed on the printed copy to Auguste Durand (though originally intended by the composer for one of his colleagues) is dated September 17, 1890, and is the very heart of Franck. It is a kind of passacaglia on the rather sad and austere chorale-theme heard at the outset on the pedals. Three times varied, this theme is then followed by an extension as long as itself. A short episodic diversion follows, and then, again, an extension of the chorale-theme and a transposition of the diversion. This section of the piece ends with yet another extension in the form of a hushed, prayer-like passage for the *Voix humaine* stop. Its peace is interrupted by a page of loud, dramatic flourishes, after which the development of the chorale idea continues. From a quiet start the music grows in intensity until the chorale is heard in a bold *fortissimo*. But the final section of the *Choral* ends like the first, in a mood of utter serenity.

SIX PIÈCES (1860-2)

Fantaisie in C major, Op. 16

The *Fantaisie* in C is the first and least often played of Franck's *Six Pièces* composed between 1860 and 1862. Its restrained mood and rather naive manner are disarming, even baffling, beside the chromaticisms and dynamic contrasts of his better-known organ pieces. This may have something to do with its undeserved neglect.

A simple diatonic theme in C major and common time quietly opens the first section, *Poco lento*. A similar strain, exposed in canon, follows. When the canon is repeated, a counter-melody sings above it. The opening bars are then repeated. A few modulating chords link this opening section to an *Allegretto*, in F minor and two-four time. This more extended section is based on the two strands which are heard combined in its opening phrase. A short bridge-passage, *Quasi lento*, modulated back to the tonic key for the final section, an *Adagio* of rapt and seraphic simplicity.

Franck inscribed the *Fantaisie en ut* to a brother-organist, his friend Charles-Alexis Chauvet, credited with being one of the rare French church musicians of his time to play the larger organ pieces of Bach.

SIDE ONE

1. CHORAL NO. 2 IN B MINOR (14:19)
2. FANTASIE IN C MAJOR, OP. 16 (12:11)

SIDE TWO

GRANDE PIÈCE SYMPHONIQUE (25:46)

Grande Pièce Symphonique, Op. 17

Franck inscribed the second and longest of his *Six Pièces* to that enigmatic musician Charles Valentin Alkan, some of whose piano music is heard from time to time. In essence the work is a sonata with a number of clearly defined sections grouped in three main movements which are linked into a musical whole: (a) an Introduction and *Allegro* in F sharp minor; (b) an *Andante* in B major; (c) a Finale in F sharp major preceded by recapitulation of previous material in a manner recalling the finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

(a) In the Introduction, a rather restless strain, *Andantino serioso*, alternates with a pleading *quasi ad libitum*. The music rises to a climax and recedes before a quick *crescendo* to the abrupt opening of the *Allegro non troppo e maestoso* with its chorale-like second subject in the relative major. The pleading strain from the Introduction reappears once during the course of this section, and also at its end.

(b) The *Andante* presents one of those conjunct melodies, dear to Franck, that hover around the third of the scale. Its second half is heard in canon, another formula favoured by the composer. Semi-quaver movement is maintained in the central portion of the movement, an *Allegro* which supplies the *scherzo* element to the work. A quiet reprise of the *Andante* follows.

(c) First the previous themes are passed under review: the vigorous *maestoso* pedal theme of the initial *Allegro*, the *Andantino serioso* of the Introduction, a hint of the *scherzo* and of the *Andante*. Then, after one of those pauses that are a feature of the work, and by which Franck made allowance for the time taken to effect stop changes on the Sainte-Clotilde organ, the Finale bursts out in the tonic major. The triumphant tune heard over the rolling quavers in the pedal part is a major version of the *maestoso* theme of the first *Allegro*. A *fugato* leads to the loud and joyful conclusion.

Felix Aprahamian, 1969



JEANNE DEMESSIEUX (1921-1968), born in Montpellier, completed her studies at the Paris Conservatoire in 1941, holding four first prizes: Harmony, Piano, Counterpoint and Fugue, Organ and Improvisation.

She made her début at the Salle Pleyel during the 1946/7 season with a series of twelve recitals interpreting from memory the principal part of the organ repertoire and improvising a symphony in four movements. She was the first woman invited to give recitals at Westminster Cathedral, and her international career included three big transcontinental tours in the U.S.A. and more than 600 concerts in Europe.

Title-holder of the Cavallé-Coll organ at the Madeleine, Paris, Demessieux counted among her illustrious predecessors both Saint-Saëns and Fauré. She was Professor of Organ at the Liège Conservatoire

where the very personal experience of her style and technique attracted organists of all nationalities.

Jeanne Demessieux published many important works for her instrument, including the *Seven Meditations*, the *Poem for Organ and Orchestra*, the famous *Etudes* and the *Te Deum*.

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CESAR FRANCK: ORGAN WORKS—Volume 2

1. Choral No. 2 in B minor (14.19)
2. Fantaisie in C major, Op. 16 (12.11)

JEANNE DEMESSIEUX

at the Organ of the Church of the Madeleine, Paris

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Grande pièce symphonique, Op. 17 (25.48)

JEANNE DEMESSIEUX
at the Organ of the Church of the Madeleine, Paris

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